

The Epiphany
 January 6, 2019
 Rev. Ken Wratten at St. Luke's
 Isaiah 60:1-6
 Psalm 72:1-7, 10-14
 Ephesians 3:1-12
 Matthew 2:1-12

I grew up in our family-owned RV business; fixing LP furnaces, wiring cars, and installing hitches. I was pretty good at it. I have always been a detail person. I care about details. They are important to me. My attention to details drove my father crazy. He just wanted the job to get done; not necessarily perfectly. That idea just didn't work for me.

One aspect I really love about preparing sermons is diving into the details. The details of today's readings about the Epiphany reveal information I never saw before. Let me share some of what I found in my study.

Detail: This date, January 6, was celebrated in Egypt as the winter solstice, when the sun god made his appearance (epiphany). Third century Christians chose this date for the Lord's Epiphany, and connected it with three Gospel 'epiphany' stories; the coming of the Magi, the baptism of Jesus (with God's pronouncement), and the wedding at Cana.

Detail: The Magi were not kings. Magi is a Greek word meaning wise men who were astrologers and interpreters of dreams. It is believed that they were members of a priestly class, probably from Babylon. It was widely believed in those times that a new star appeared whenever great rulers were born.

At the time of Jesus' birth, Herod had built Jerusalem into a city of splendor. He had expanded and rebuilt the Jerusalem Temple into a spectacular house of worship. It is no wonder that the wise men headed for Jerusalem to find the new ruler who was predicted by the moving star.

The word epiphany is a Greek word meaning: manifestation. The Feast of the Epiphany is the celebration of Jesus being manifested, made known, to the Magi from the east; it is the celebration of Jesus being made known to the Gentile world. The Magi were the ultimate Gentiles. They had no religious or cultural connections with Israel. Yet they sought out Jesus, to honor and worship him.

Detail: The magi were NOT at the stable when Jesus was born. Matthew 2 says that AFTER Jesus was born in Bethlehem, the magi went to Jerusalem (not Bethlehem). When King Herod heard about them, and who they were looking for, he asked the chief priests where the Christ was to be born. It was to happen in Bethlehem. So he sent them there. They went to the HOUSE where Mary and the child were.

The Magi had first gone to Jerusalem; the big opulent, fancy city. They went to the wrong place. But King Herod sent them to Bethlehem – hoping they would reveal to him where this potential future rival might be.

Detail: The Magi went to the wrong place, but they were led by God to the right place. The Magi weren't alone. All of us look to find Jesus. Where do you look for him? The tendency might be to look for him only in fasting and prayer, or only in high liturgies at a cathedral, or only on Sunday mornings.

Or we might look for him only in the experts; in the clergy; in each other; in 'outsiders'; in children; in ourselves. The Feast of the Epiphany is about discovering, or rediscovering, that the answer is that Jesus is made known to us in ALL THE ABOVE. To reject any possibility is like having the Magi look for Jesus only in Jerusalem, where they would expect him to be, and to never look for him in Bethlehem where he was all the time. Where have you found Jesus – that it surprised you to find him there?

For me, a recent surprise visit from Jesus was our Backpack Bag assembly day at the Food Bank in November. I asked for 10-12 people to come and help. We had 28 people come – from five years old to ninety-two; from church and preschool, and their friends and extended families. We all came to serve the needs of hungry kids, and we served God.

Looking at the details in the story of the Wise Men helps us to realize what an important day this is in our church year. It marks Jesus being revealed to everyone on the planet, not only Israel. It marks God's powers to take those wandering Magi to exactly the place they needed to be. Having their GPS turned off didn't matter. The jealousy of King Herod didn't matter. The humble birth and housing arrangements didn't matter. God made it happen, just exactly as God wanted it to happen. When you and I are in the flow of God's purpose, God makes things happen!

May this Epiphany be a reminder of the time each of us discovered – or we rediscover God's love made known and personal to us. May we always be open to new ways for God to be revealed to us. May your spiritual journey be filled with epiphanies.

Amen.